

DO BRIDGES UNITE?

The author, as the foreign minister of a new EU and NATO member state, outlines his country's vision for the transatlantic partnership. As argued in this article, both pillars of the Euro-Atlantic community are indispensable under current circumstances. Latvia's membership in the EU and NATO strengthens transatlantic ties; if these ties are weakened, Latvia's security is also likely to be weakened. Following the accession to the EU and NATO of Latvia and the other new members, a greater vitality is noticeable in these organizations both in a political and an economic sense.

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Latvia joined the EU and NATO in 2004 and thereby achieved its principal foreign policy objectives since the regaining of independence in 1991. One decade earlier, even the most courageous of dreamers would not have allowed themselves to imagine this goal as being achievable. The main doubts were the possible objections of Russia to the NATO membership of its former domains as well as other geo-strategic assessments by Latvia's Western partners. Despite these factors, Latvia is now firmly integrated into Euro-Atlantic structures. Latvia is deeply grateful for the important role that countries such as Turkey played in bringing us closer to these structures. It is well known that from the moment the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were occupied and annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940, the United States of America did not recognize the legality of this forceful incorporation, nor did many other countries, including Turkey. During the Cold War, the United States continued this policy of non-recognition and actively supported the aspirations of the Baltic states to regain their independence. As one of the Cold War superpowers, American policy was critical to future prospects of Baltic independence. When the Cold War ended, the commitment of the United States to the three Baltic states continued and was instrumental in ensuring that Baltic independence was secured in 1991. Moreover, the United States never wavered in its commitment to helping the Baltic states in their quest for integration into Euro-Atlantic structures.

Now that we are members of NATO and of the European Union, the challenge for Latvia and other new members is to participate in the formulation of the external policies of these two organizations. Our expectation is that the new members will have a distinct role to play in these organizations. Most of the countries that spent the post-war period locked in the tight grip of the Soviet Union and have an acute sensitivity toward security issues and a keen appreciation of the power modalities existing in the world.

For these reasons, Latvia's membership in the EU and NATO strengthens transatlantic ties and U.S. involvement in European and regional processes. If these ties are weakened, Latvia's security is also likely to be weakened, at least until the EU has realized a common foreign and security policy, which Latvia has also been advocating. At the same time, Latvia's government is aware of the necessity to continue its work on consolidation of the EU's global position since, despite the U.S. being Latvia's strategic partner, Latvia is indeed an EU member state, with all the consequences it entails.

Following the accession to the EU and NATO of Latvia and the other new members, a greater vitality is noticeable in these organizations both in a political and an economic sense. The new member states undeniably represent a support base for consolidating transatlantic ties since more attention is being paid to the necessity of coordinating EU and U.S. foreign policies while at the same time stressing the need for the creation of a genuine EU foreign and security policy based on a powerful and competitive economy.

During the past three years, Latvia has been an active advocate of the EU Neighborhood Policy initiative. The former USSR states of Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus and others have been singled out as the priorities of Latvia's development policy. Latvia has a

good reputation in the former Soviet territory, and it can position itself as a role-model for the implementation of reforms in other countries. Latvia is also becoming increasingly involved in the EU's relationship with the Balkan states and with Turkey. The latter is a loyal partner of Latvia within the framework of NATO. Latvia is interested in a successful future co-operation between the EU and NATO as well as in a possible interface between NATO and EU members.

It is undeniable that EU-U.S. cooperation during the past 10 years has been not only a challenging but also a beneficial experience. Democracy has gained more ground in Eastern Europe, and thanks to the new member-states, EU influence across the former USSR-dominated zone has increased. The opportunity to organize a NATO Summit in Riga this November reassures that NATO member states are not being sorted into categories by origin or "skin color". The influence of U.S. allies has increased since the latest EU enlargement. But they are not uncritical friends; friendship remains meaningful only if there is mutual trust. There are a number of issues, in which countries such as Latvia would like to see more rapid progress regarding issues on the agenda of the relationship with the U.S. A more active EU foreign policy is required for this progress to be made. Latvia, for example, is not satisfied with the unilateral visa regime with the U.S. and with Canada. In addition, Latvia seeks U.S. support in becoming a member of the OECD.

Latvia recognizes that there is a strategic need for the U.S. to continue to be engaged in European affairs through its membership in NATO. Article 5 of the Washington Treaty is the foundational basis of the Alliance, and the commitment of the United States to underwrite Article 5 has been the mainstay of the Alliance from its inception. America today provides the Alliance with an unquestionable military superiority relative to any other major power or combination of powers.

While the threat posed by the former Soviet Union is gone, the future remains unpredictable, especially taking into account the new threats that have emerged in this post-Cold War period. Security does not now just relate to a country's territorial inviolability, but to a host of other non-traditional threats such as those posed by terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, failed states, ethnic conflict etc., or any combination of these. As has often been remarked, these threats are not localized but spill over borders and can even be global in nature, thus taxing the ability of any one country to deal with them alone. The conclusion is that a cooperative response is the only approach that states can take to fend off these threats. NATO, as the most successful collective defense organization in the world and which pools the military capabilities of its member states, is the appropriate forum for dealing with these threats.

We have to recognize that without the participation of the United States in formulating an appropriate response to these threats, the ability of each individual NATO member state to deal with such threats would be severely circumscribed. At the same time, we have to recognize that even the capabilities and the resources of the United States are not infinite and can be constrained by domestic politics. But, if the United States can be viewed as indispensable for dealing with the new security threats, the United States is also in need

of allies – allies are indispensable too. It is fair to say that this mutual indispensability has come into sharper relief over the last few years. A fundamental rupture in inter-ally relations does not aid regional or global security. This mutual realism augurs well for the Alliance. It is in the context of this recognition that solidarity furthers global stability and security and that Latvia participates as part of the coalition forces in Iraq and as part of the NATO force in Afghanistan, not to mention in Kosovo and Bosnia. The Alliance's future rests on a shared sense of solidarity and on an appreciation of the fact that division within the Alliance can only work to the detriment of all.

In addition to NATO, the European Union has begun to position itself as another global security provider. Latvia welcomes this European initiative and sees the role of the EU as being complementary to that of NATO. The CFSP and ESDP include a range of tools that the EU can use to influence global processes that can also provide common global good. The EU is increasingly becoming an international actor in its own right, though, admittedly, with the failure of the Constitution Treaty the further evolution of this capability has been put on hold for the time being. Nevertheless, the European Union's involvement in the Balkans, Africa, and now in Lebanon attests to its growing international role. Unquestionably, the combination of the European Union's civil and military assets provides a valuable addition to the international community's array of tools that can strengthen global peace and stability.

Accepting the proposition that the United States is an indispensable element in the global security architecture, the EU cannot seek to displace the United States nor to act as a counterweight. However, the question remains: 'What is the place of the EU in the global security system?' As the EU's preferred course of action is to work through multilateral institutions, one can expect that it would favor the reaching of consensus with its partners in resolving conflicts. Given the emerging climate of opinion on both sides of the Atlantic it can be expected that consensus building will be strengthened; thus allowing a greater role for the European pillar of Euro-Atlanticism in the provision of global peace and security.

Needless to say, tactical issues and details will still burden the transatlantic relationship. However, if a strategic dialogue can take place between the two pillars of the Euro-Atlantic community to build a consensus on how to deal with the threats of the 21st century, global security will be enhanced.

Latvia's vision on the future of the U.S. and EU is one of cooperation, in which countries such as Latvia have the opportunity to achieve a successful combination of their strategic partnership with the U.S. and membership in the EU. During the last three years, Latvia has proven that it is not a *free rider* of either NATO or the EU. It is in Latvia's national interests to find solutions as soon as possible to a number of issues presently burdening the European Union and NATO. These issues include cooperation between NATO and the EU in security and military issues, the capacity-building of EU foreign policy, the improvement of competitiveness, the future of constitutional reform and, of course, enlargement. Regarding the latter, it is clear that in the area of enlargement and social economic reform, the European Union is becoming increasingly dependent on populist

slogans being put forward by certain political forces in individual member states. This is a dangerous tendency since modern Europe is facing a dilemma similar to that encountered by the city-state of Athens 2,000 years ago. That is, either it continues to pursue an open policy and becomes an influential global player or it shuts itself off from this possibility thus passing the verdict on its growing backwardness.

Latvia believes in a strong and effective NATO and in a strong and effective European Union. As argued above, both pillars of the Euro-Atlantic community are indispensable under current circumstances. The strengths of each complement the other. The closer these two pillars draw together on how to deal with the threats and conflicts of the 21st century, the more assurance there will be that international organizations will be strengthened and thus, the more likely it is that the global public benefits of peace and stability will be enhanced. Latvia will work toward this objective within NATO and the European Union and will try to build bridges.